




# Panicum virgatum

## Switchgrass

Tried and True  
Native Plant Selections  
for the Mid-Atlantic

Once the dominant species of the North American tallgrass prairie, this native\* warm-season grass is noted for the open, airy appearance of its seed heads and the multi-season interest of its foliage. Many ornamental **cultivars** are available.



Grass	Flowers, Plant in Summer, En Masse in Fall
Height: 3–6 feet	 
Spread: 2–3 feet	
Bloom color: Pink-tinged	
<b>Characteristics</b>	
Stiff, vase-shaped, clumping, warm season, <a href="#">deciduous perennial</a> grass with deep, <a href="#">fibrous roots</a>	
On round green <a href="#">culms</a> , narrow, <a href="#">glabrous/pubescent</a> blue-green leaves turn yellow in fall & tan in winter	
Pink-tinged flower <a href="#">spikelets</a> w/ <a href="#">staminate</a> lower <a href="#">florets</a> form airy <a href="#">panicles</a> above foliage June–October; fruit grain ( <a href="#">caryopsis</a> ) displays August–November	<p>Forms colonies thru <a href="#">rhizome</a> spread &amp; self-seeding</p>
<b>Attributes</b>	
Tolerates drought, air pollution, salt, Black Walnut	
No serious pests or diseases; <a href="#">deer</a> rarely damage	
Winter interest; palatable forage grass	
Controls erosion and stabilizes soil through <a href="#">root</a> system reaching depth of 10 feet	
Food source and cover for birds; <a href="#">larval</a> host to ~28 <a href="#">lepidopterans</a> including a variety of skippers	<p><b>Excellent Replacement for</b></p> <p><a href="#">Bambusa</a>, <a href="#">Phyllostachys</a>, <a href="#">Pseudosasa</a> spp - Bamboo</p> <p><a href="#">Miscanthus sinensis</a> - Chinese Silver Grass</p> <p><a href="#">Pennisetum alopecuroides</a> - Fountain Grass</p>
<b>Growing and Maintenance Tips</b>	
<a href="#">Soil Requirements</a> : Average, well-drained	
<a href="#">Light Requirements</a> : Sun (best), Partial Shade	
<a href="#">Water Requirements</a> : Moist	
Avoid excess shade, fertilizers; extreme flammability rating so do not plant near house	<p>*It is <a href="#">native</a> to DC. In DE and MD, it is common in the Coastal Plain. In PA, it is found in scattered counties with concentrations along the Delaware River. In VA, many herbarium species are only partially mapped. Current mapping shows this species is found throughout VA except for its south central and southwestern counties.</p>
Cut back to 8 inches in late winter or early spring	
Use as accent plant, screen, or mass planting in borders, meadows, water-wise, or rain gardens	
<a href="#">Hardiness</a> : USDA Zones 3a–9b	
<p><i>developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria</i></p>	

Images by Elaine Mills, Arlington, VA and Rockville, MD